

POLITICS AS USUAL: No Go? Oh no!

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

As a daily transit user, I can tell you, from first hand, hard won experience, that our transit system, while serviceable, is certainly less than ideal.

Frankly, it's busting at the seams. Trains are full, buses are standing room only and stations ? when open ? are very small and thus provide little in the way of shelter from sleet, rain, hail and snow for the majority of riders. Service options are limited, with wait times of up to an hour between buses or trains.

Given the obvious strain on our existing rail and bus services in York region, folks desperately need better means of getting around the GTA.

So, given that folks are clamouring for some kind of relief from their hellacious commutes, politicians at all levels of government have snapped to attention. Transit service improvement initiatives are all over the news these days (it has the whiff of an election in the air, don't you think?).

All-Day two-way GO service!

Weekend GO train service!

More parking!

The exclamation points are mine, but you get the gist.

All of this is wonderful, of course. As someone who has taken a jam-packed GO bus at 5 a.m. I can tell you that adding trains to the Barrie line is truly a god send?

But amidst all this feel good news, there is something getting overlooked. While there are many new stations being built, for the first time in its history, Metrolinx is considering closing a GO station; A closure that will have a serious impact on the commute for residents in Aurora. Odd that you didn't hear that rather important piece of transit news eh?

Metrolinx is considering closing the York University GO station stop. Apparently, they think it's underused. I am not clear how they came to that conclusion, but suffice it to say it is not the correct conclusion to draw. That station is used by literally thousands of commuters every day; not just York university students, staff and faculty, but Seneca students as well.

Folks may not be aware, but York's campus is a community transit hub. Riders get off YRT, VIVA or GO ? at the York GO station ? and then transfer onto other transit such as TTC to get to Toronto or Zoom to get to Brampton. Students, staff and faculty from other institutions get off at York and then transfer to Mac, to Sheridan, to Humber. Commuters transfer to other lines so that they can get to their jobs in Etobicoke, Mississauga, Brampton, Hamilton, Oshawa and on and on.

By closing the GO station at York, riders would be forced to continue on to the new stop in North York get off the GO train, transfer to the subway, ride three stops back up to York U, then transfer again, to get to wherever they are going. As a result of the closure, best case scenario, riders will be adding a good 45 minutes a day to their commute. There's also likely a cost implication as well, as folks will probably have to pay to ride the subway given that they have to transfer to TTC. The details on fare integration have not been clarified.

A strong effort is underway to get Metrolinx to reconsider, from the President of York University to everyday commuters, to online petitions, people have been contacting Metrolinx to let them know that we need the station to remain open.

Aurora Council is doing its part as well. On Tuesday, March 28, Councillor Thompson put forward a motion for consideration asking that Metrolinx not close the station. At press time, the motion had not been deliberated but I hope that Council does support it.

The closure of the York University GO station will have serious impacts for York region residents. Any effort to stop it would be very welcome indeed.